

CHAPTER XXII

THE TURKISH COUNTER-ATTACK AT CHUNUK BAIR

(Sketches 27, 28)

SHORTLY after midday on the 9th August Sir Ian Hamilton ^{9 Aug.} dashed across in a motor boat from Suvla to Anzac and held a conference with General Birdwood and his divisional commanders at No. 2 Post. It was already known by that time that the third attack on Sari Bair had been no more successful than Stopford's advance on Tekke Tepe. But the atmosphere of confidence at Birdwood's headquarters was in such marked contrast to the gloom prevailing at Suvla that Sir Ian Hamilton at once offered Birdwood his last remaining reserve—the 54th Division—to strengthen his next attack.

General Birdwood was obliged to refuse this proffered help. For the moment, he explained, and until his communications could be improved, it was impossible to water and feed a larger force at Anzac. He begged, however, that the division might be sent to Suvla at the earliest possible moment. In that area there was far more room for its deployment; and from the point of view of his own operations it could not be employed more usefully than in helping the IX Corps to gain the Tekke Tepe ridge and Biyuk Anafarta.

We have already seen that before noon on the 9th General Godley had rearranged the command on his new front at Anzac, and had placed General Shaw in control at Rhododendron Spur and the Farm. Br.-General Johnston, coming under Shaw's orders, was to remain for the present in command of the troops on and in front of Rhododendron. But his forward units would be replaced after nightfall by New Army battalions and his whole brigade would be withdrawn as soon as possible.

In accordance with those arrangements the weary New Zealand troops at the Pinnacle and on the slopes of Chunuk Bair were relieved after nightfall by the 6/Loyal North Lancashire under Lieut.-Colonel H. G. Levinge. The relief was not a moment too soon. The Auckland Battalion had

9 Aug. lost 12 officers and 308 men: Otago 17 officers and 300 men; the two squadrons of Wellington Mounted Rifles, which had come up 173 strong, now numbered only 63.

It had been arranged that two New Army battalions should hold the advanced positions at the Pinnacle and Chunuk Bair, and the 5/Wiltshire had been ordered to move up from near the Farm in support of the Loyal North Lancashire. Actually there was only room in the front-line trenches for 700 men; but it was considered that, provided the second battalion arrived in plenty of time, it would be able to dig itself in before daybreak.

10 Aug. Unfortunate blundering ruined this plan. Only 2½ companies of the 5/Wiltshire received the order to move, and it reached them so late that they did not arrive on the slopes of Chunuk Bair till nearly 3 A.M. There was no room for them in the existing trenches; so, as dawn would come in an hour, they were ordered to withdraw down the steep slopes in rear to the Sazli Beit ravine, which a New Zealand guide declared to be dead ground. Here, utterly worn out, the Wiltshire companies took off their equipment, piled their rifles and flung themselves down for the first sleep they had had for four days.

Sketch 27. At daybreak on the 10th August, therefore, the British line at the head of Rhododendron Spur was held by three companies of the Loyal North Lancashire (38th Brigade) in the forward trenches, and one company at the Pinnacle. To the right of and far below the Pinnacle were 2½ companies of the 5/Wiltshire (40th Brigade), while the Apex was held by the remnants of the Wellington Battalion, some of the 6/Leinster (29th Brigade) and the massed machine guns of the New Zealand Infantry Brigade.

It will be seen, therefore, that at this highly important point in the main battle area the small British garrison of not more than 2,000 men was terribly intermixed. The units of which it was composed belonged to no less than four different brigades of three different divisions. They were mostly strangers to each other and to the brigadier in command. Br.-General Johnston, in local command, was receiving orders from Major-General Shaw—a total stranger; and General Shaw was in turn receiving orders from Major-General Godley. Neither Shaw nor Godley had ever seen the ground, or had any idea what it looked like.

North of Rhododendron Spur there was greater confusion still, for there even the unity of battalions had been broken up, and infantry companies of various units were very intermixed. In the immediate neighbourhood of the Farm, also under the

divisional command of General Shaw, the British line was 10 Aug. commanded by Br.-General A. H. Baldwin (38th Brigade). It seems to have been held from right to left by two companies of the 10/Hampshire (29th Brigade), 1½ companies of the 5/Wiltshire (40th Brigade), the 6/Royal Irish Rifles (29th Brigade) and 1½ companies of the 9/R. Warwickshire (39th Brigade). Br.-General Baldwin's headquarters was on the western edge of the Farm plateau, and here, too, assisting Baldwin, were Br.-General R. J. Cooper and the staff of the 29th Brigade. In support, on the opposite (left) side of the Aghyl Dere, were the 6/East Lancashire of Baldwin's own brigade and the other two companies of the 10/Hampshire.

More confusing still was the jumble of units between the Farm plateau and the right of the 4th Australian Brigade on Damakjelik Spur. Here the line was nominally under Major-General Cox, commanding the Indian brigade. But many of the Indian troops had been relieved, and the forward units mostly belonged to Br.-General Cayley's 39th Brigade. From right to left they appear to have consisted of 2½ companies of the 9/Warwickshire, the 1/6th Gurkhas (still pushed out in front under Hill Q), a detachment of the 6/South Lancashire (38th Brigade), the 9/Worcestershire and three companies of the 7/North Staffordshire (both of the 39th Brigade), and the 1/5th Gurkhas. The last-named battalion was in touch on its left with the 4th Australian Brigade, the right of which had been extended overnight to relieve the 14th Sikhs.

Along Damakjelik Spur, also under the command of Major-General Cox, were the 4th Australian Brigade under Br.-General Monash and the 4/South Wales Borderers of the 40th Brigade. Br.-General J. H. du B. Travers (40th Brigade), who had hitherto had his headquarters on Damakjelik Bair, was to take over during the day from Johnston at the Apex.

The foregoing details will show that on the morning of the 10th August General Godley's force to the north of the old Anzac position was not only unready for further offensive action: it was in no fit state to meet a determined attack. Most of the troops were dead tired; many of the units had lost the greater part of their officers; the normal chain of command had disappeared. The gullies in rear, which formed the only means of communication, were choked with wounded; water was very short; and the utmost difficulty was still being experienced in supplying the forward troops with food and ammunition.

For the Turks, on the other hand, the situation during the last 24 hours had been rapidly improving. Mustafa Kemal's counter-attack at dawn on the 9th, though unsuccessful

10 Aug. on its left flank, had effectually checked the advance of the IX Corps at Suvla. The W Hills and the Anafarta spur were securely held by the Turks; the Tekke Tepe ridge was occupied by at least five battalions supported by artillery; and by the evening of the 9th all fear of the loss of these positions had temporarily disappeared. In these circumstances the one immediate danger-point, from the Turkish point of view, was the summit of Chunuk Bair.

Mustafa Kemal, who now found himself in command of the whole Turkish line north of Battleship Hill, was thoroughly alive to this danger. Late on the 9th, after a daring personal reconnaissance of Chunuk Bair, he decided to launch an attack from that point next morning with a force of six battalions, hurl the British from their foothold on the western slope of the ridge, and drive a wedge into Birdwood's new line by recapturing Rhododendron Spur and the Farm. At the very moment, therefore, when the 5/Wiltshire was falling back from the front line to the bed of Sazli Beit Dere, six Turkish battalions were forming up for attack on the opposite side of the hill.

This Turkish counter-stroke was admirably planned. Profiting by a quiet night, the commander of the 6/Loyal North Lancashire had sent forward observation posts to the crest of the ridge to guard against surprise. But these posts were rushed by Turkish bombers just before daybreak and for the next half hour the front line on the reverse slope was assailed by showers of bombs, followed about half past four by rapid artillery fire from both flanks.

Suddenly, at 4.45 A.M., dense waves of Turks came pouring over the sky-line. The British trench was overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers, and very few of its garrison escaped.¹ About the same moment the 5/Wiltshire, unarmed and unequipped in the valley below, was surprised by an attack on its right flank, and scattered in all directions.

Five minutes later the Turks had captured the Pinnacle, but at that point their advance was stopped by annihilating fire from the New Zealand machine guns at the Apex. The Leinsters were rushed into line to hold the Apex position, and this they succeeded in doing for the rest of the day. In the course of this fighting their commanding officer (Lieut.-Col. J. Craske) was badly wounded.

Meanwhile, on the northern side of Rhododendron Spur the right wing of Mustafa Kemal's attack was pouring down the steep hillside from Chunuk Bair to the Farm, and a bitter

¹ Of the Loyal North Lancashire, Lieut.-Colonel H. G. Levinge, nine other officers and nearly 500 men were reported missing.

hand-to-hand struggle was taking place for the possession of the 10 Aug. Farm plateau.

Accurate details of this grim struggle have never come to light, but British casualties bear silent witness to the gallant bearing of all the New Army troops. The detachment of the Warwickshire was killed almost to a man. The 6/Royal Irish Rifles lost half its rank and file and nearly all its officers, including Lieut.-Colonel E. C. Bradford, wounded, and his adjutant killed. Br.-General Baldwin and his brigade-major fell in the front line. Br.-General Cooper was severely wounded, and every officer of 29th Brigade headquarters was either wounded or killed.

By 10 A.M. the remnants of Baldwin's troops in the neighbourhood of the Farm had fallen back to Cheshire Ridge on the left side of Aghyl Dere. The Turks, too exhausted to follow, and too weak even to stay where they were, had retreated to the main ridge. The Farm plateau, forsaken by both sides, was held by the dying and the dead.

Further to the north, Cayley's and Cox's brigades had not been touched by Mustafa Kemal's attack. But the 9/Worcestershire, somewhat in advance of the units on either flank, had been heavily bombed at daybreak. Its commander, Lieut.-Colonel M. H. Nunn, had been killed in this affair, and six other officers either killed or wounded. The battalion had fallen back to the line of Aghyl Dere. The units on either flank had maintained their positions, but owing to the growing confusion in the valley in rear,¹ no reinforcing troops had been able to work their way forward.

When, therefore, about 10 A.M., the last British troops fell back from the Farm, Cayley's units on their immediate left, finding themselves with both flanks in the air, also began to withdraw, and orders were issued soon afterwards for the rest of his line to conform. The 1/6th Gurkhas, which had remained throughout in its advanced position under Hill Q, and had not been attacked, was the last to fall back. Captain E. S. Phipson, I.M.S., the regimental doctor, was the only British officer with this battalion, and the withdrawal was carried out by Subadar-Major Gambir Singh Pun. By midday, the British line ran roughly due north from Cheshire Ridge to the right of the 4th Australian Brigade on Damakjelik Spur.

About 7 A.M., when General Birdwood realized the seriousness of the threat to the Farm, he ordered the 5/Connaught

¹ Captain N. K. Street, the staff-captain of the 39th Brigade, stopped a large number of stragglers in the valley, and gallantly led them back to a point near the Farm, where he himself was killed.

10 Aug. Rangers (29th Brigade) at Lone Pine to march at once to join its own brigade. This battalion, moving up Aghyl Dere, was seriously hampered and delayed by the general confusion in the valley. But it began to reach Cayley's headquarters soon after midday, and at two o'clock was ordered forward to reoccupy the Farm and the high ground to the right. This the Irish troops succeeded in doing without much trouble. But now that the Pinnacle had been lost, the Farm position was desperately exposed. After dusk, therefore, and after they had succeeded in rescuing a large number of wounded, the Irishmen were ordered by the brigadier to withdraw to Cheshire Ridge.

Sketch 28. The close of the fighting at Anzac on the 10th August marks the end of the four days Battle of Sari Bair. General Birdwood's troops, with over 12,000 casualties, and no available reserves, were incapable of further effort. The Anzac plan for capturing the main ridge had been definitely and finally frustrated.

Neither at G.H.Q. nor at Anzac headquarters was the true seriousness of the situation at first realized. It was recognized, no doubt, that a frontal attack on the Sari Bair ridge could no longer hope to succeed. But all information pointed to the fact that the Turks at Suvla were still in no great strength, and for some time longer the hope persisted that by pressing forward on the left the Tekke Tepe ridge might be gained and Sari Bair outflanked.

In point of fact, however, the double failure—at Anzac and at Suvla—on the 9th August had already marked the defeat of Sir Ian Hamilton's plan for the August offensive. Up to day-break on the 9th the situation of the Turkish Army, despite two unexpected days of respite, had remained critical. The Sari Bair ridge, the possession of which was vital to the defence of the Narrows, was in imminent danger of capture. North of it the Anafarta gap, whence the whole ridge could be turned, was protected by only a skeleton force against Stopford's two divisions. The long and important Tekke Tepe ridge was not defended at all. But at Anzac on the 9th August, General Godley's third attempt on Sari Bair had ended in failure. At Suvla, General Stopford's force, forestalled on the surrounding hills, had been driven back with loss to the centre of the plain.

Out of some 50,000 British troops engaged at Suvla and Anzac, the casualties in three days' fighting had amounted to not less than 18,000, and the Turkish forces, though still inferior in numbers, were firmly established on every point of vantage. The Turkish strength, moreover, was increasing

hourly, while Sir Ian Hamilton was nearly at the end of his Aug. resources.

On a gaunt ridge overlooking Kilia Bay, about three miles north of Chanak, a massive stone obelisk can now be seen by all who make the passage of the Dardanelles. This monument is on the summit of Chunuk Bair; it marks the spot which was gained by New Zealand troops in the greatest battle of the Dardanelles campaign; and its many-faceted sides, catching the sun's rays at every hour of the day, would seem to reflect the glory of the brave deeds they commemorate. Looking up at that shining memorial the traveller needs little military knowledge to recognize the vital importance of Chunuk Bair in August 1915, or the measure of the Turkish peril while that dominating height remained in British keeping.

THE SHIPMENT OF THE WOUNDED FROM ANZAC AND SUVLA

Throughout the four days' fighting, the sufferings of the wounded at Anzac, and in a lesser degree at Suvla had been almost indescribable. The collection of gravely wounded cases from the steep hillsides at Anzac into the tortuous valleys below, and their conveyance thence to the beach, were only carried out with extreme difficulty. Conveyance by hand-stretcher was the sole practicable means; and the stretcher-bearers worked till they dropped. But it was quite impossible to deal expeditiously with very large numbers in this manner; and the sides of the gullies were lined with gravely wounded men, lying out in the blazing sun, choked by the dust of passing troops and mules, tortured by flies, and driven mad by thirst.

Down on the beach conditions were almost as bad. According to the prearranged plan for evacuation, all wounded were to be taken direct to waiting hospital ships, where they would be quickly classified on deck, the serious cases being retained on board, and the lightly wounded passed across to trawlers, moored on the opposite side of the ship, for conveyance to "hospital carriers"¹ in Imbros harbour. Owing, however, to the requirements of the fighting troops being paramount, there were not enough lighters for the prompt evacuation of all the wounded as they streamed down from the front, and the number of trawlers available for light cases was also far too small.

¹ The transports fitted out as hospital carriers were not protected by the Geneva convention, and could not lie off the peninsula coast like hospital ships.

Aug. At Mudros Sir James Porter, the recently appointed Principal Hospital Transport Officer, had done everything possible to prepare, as they became available, the transports ear-marked for duty as hospital carriers. It was an uphill task, for the medical equipment had in many cases been shipped from England at the bottom of the holds of store-ships, where it was not readily recoverable. Some of the selected ships, too, had been indifferently fitted up, and a few were so unsuitable that Sir James Porter had to reject them. Here again the insufficiency of small craft at Mudros had increased the difficulty of completing all these preliminary arrangements. Moreover even a moderate wind in Mudros harbour made boat-work very difficult.

On the 13th August the hospitals at Egypt and Malta were reported full, and two days later, as there were no hospital ships at Mudros and no available hospital accommodation on shore, Sir James Porter was obliged to fit out the *Aquitania* very hurriedly as a hospital carrier and despatch her direct from Mudros to England with no less than 2,400 wounded selected for the voyage by the military medical authorities. The great Cunarder, which returned to Mudros later as a fully equipped hospital ship, was followed home by other liners bearing similar freights, and these drastic measures saved the situation.

Between the 6th and the 13th August nearly 22,000 sick and wounded were brought off the peninsula. These were approximately the numbers which Sir Ian Hamilton had foreshadowed in his telegram of the 13th July;¹ yet it is unfortunately true that many of the wounded made the voyage to the base under conditions which subsequently aroused the strongest indignation in England and Australia. As already shown, the very character of the operations inevitably entailed a degree of suffering by the wounded which they would not have had to endure in an ordinary land campaign, and no possible establishment of medical personnel at Anzac could have coped with all the wounded who required immediate attention. Yet it cannot be doubted that had the medical authorities in England begun their preparations at the moment when the Government decided on an August offensive in Gallipoli, or had Sir Ian Hamilton telegraphed his requirements earlier than the 13th July, a larger provision of hospital ships, well-equipped hospital carriers and special hospital launches would have saved a very great deal of avoidable suffering, and would have prevented sights that were highly detrimental to

¹ See page 137.

the morale of all the fighting troops. At the same time it must Aug. be remembered that it was not until well into July that Sir Ian Hamilton was definitely aware that five extra divisions were being added to his force for the August operations.

Here it may be noticed that after the August fighting the heavy sick rate of the Army imposed a continuous strain upon the medical services, and more ships had to be placed at their disposal in the autumn months. In November the War Office, always uneasy under what they considered a system of "dual control", prevailed upon the Admiralty to abolish the appointment of Principal Hospital Transport Officer. Sir James Porter accordingly left for home at the end of the month, but before his departure the medical situation was at last well in hand.